

# Roy Cooper

**Roy Asberry Cooper III** (born June 13, 1957) is an American politician and attorney who has served as the 75th Governor of North Carolina since January 1, 2017. A member of the Democratic Party, Cooper had previously served as the elected Attorney General of North Carolina since 2001. Prior to that, he served in the General Assembly in both the North Carolina House of Representatives and the North Carolina Senate.

He defeated Republican incumbent Pat McCrory for the governorship in a close race in the 2016 election.<sup>[1]</sup> On December 5, McCrory conceded the election, making Cooper the first challenger since 1850 to defeat a sitting North Carolina Governor.<sup>[2]</sup> Cooper took office on January 1, 2017. The Republican-dominated legislature passed bills in a special session before he took office to reduce the power of the governor's office. The legislature has overridden several of his vetoes of legislation.

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## Roy Cooper



### 75th Governor of North Carolina

#### Incumbent

#### Assumed office

January 1, 2017

**Lieutenant** Dan Forest

**Preceded by** Pat McCrory

### 49th Attorney General of North Carolina

#### In office

January 1, 2001 – January 1, 2017

**Governor** Mike Easley  
Bev Perdue  
Pat McCrory

**Preceded by** Mike Easley

**Succeeded by** Josh Stein

### Member of the North Carolina Senate from the 10th district

#### In office

February 21, 1991 – January 1, 2001

**Preceded by** Jim Ezzell

**Succeeded by** A. B. Swindell

#### Member of the

## Early life and education

Roy Asberry Cooper III was born on June 13, 1957 in Nashville, North Carolina to Beverly Batchelor and Roy Asberry Cooper II.<sup>[3]</sup> His mother was a teacher and his father was a lawyer. He attended public school and worked on his parents' tobacco farm during summer.<sup>[4]</sup> He graduated from Northern Nash Senior High School in 1975.<sup>[3]</sup> He received the Morehead Scholarship at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill for his undergraduate studies. He was elected as the president of the university's Young Democrats.<sup>[5]</sup> He also earned a Juris Doctor degree from the University of North Carolina School of Law in 1982.<sup>[3]</sup>

## State legislature

After practicing law with his family's law firm for a number of years, Cooper was elected to the North Carolina House of Representatives in 1986. He was appointed to the North Carolina Senate in 1991 to fill a remaining term of a seat that was vacated. In 1997, he was elected as Democratic Majority Leader of the state Senate. He continued to practice law as the managing partner of the law firm Fields & Cooper in Rocky Mount and Nashville, North Carolina.

## North Carolina Attorney General

### Elections

Cooper was elected North Carolina Attorney General in November 2000 and took office on January 6, 2001; he was re-elected for a second four-year term in 2004. Cooper was mentioned as a possible Democratic candidate for North Carolina governor in 2008, but he decided to run for re-election as Attorney General instead.<sup>[6]</sup> He was easily re-elected, defeating Republican Bob Crumley and garnering more votes than any other statewide candidate in the 2008 Attorney General election.<sup>[7]</sup>

Both state and national Democrats attempted to recruit him to run against Republican US Senator Richard Burr in 2010, but he declined.<sup>[8]</sup> In 2012 politicians suggested him as a possible candidate for Governor of North Carolina after incumbent Governor Bev Perdue announced her retirement, but Cooper declined to run.<sup>[9]</sup> His political consultant announced in 2011 that Cooper would seek a fourth term in 2012.<sup>[10]</sup> He was unopposed in both the Democratic primary and the general election.<sup>[11]</sup> In the November 2012 elections, Cooper received 2,828,941 votes.

### Tenure

In January 2007, when Durham District Attorney Mike Nifong asked to be recused from dealing with the Duke lacrosse case, Attorney General Cooper's office assumed responsibility for the case. On April 11, 2007, Cooper dismissed the case against the Duke lacrosse team players, declaring them "innocent" and victims of a "tragic rush to accuse". The decision won him bipartisan praise.<sup>[5]</sup> Two days after the 2007 Virginia Tech shooting, he created the Campus Safety Task Force to analyze school shootings and make policy recommendations to help the government prevent and respond to them. The committee delivered

| North Carolina House of Representatives <div>from the 72nd district</div>   |   |
|---|---|
| <div><b>In office</b></div> <div>February 9, 1987 – February 21, 1991</div> |   |
| <b>Preceded by</b>  | Allen Barbee  |
| <b>Succeeded by</b>   | Edward McGee  |
| Personal details  |   |
| <b>Born</b>   | <div>Roy Asberry Cooper III</div> <div>June 13, 1957</div> <div><span><span></span></span> <span>Nashville, North Carolina, U.S.</span></div> |
| <b>Political party</b>  | Democratic  |
| <b>Spouse(s)</b>  | Kristin Bernhardt   |
| <b>Children</b>   | 3   |
| <b>Residence</b>  | Executive Mansion   |
| <b>Education</b>  | University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (BA, JD)  |
| <b>Signature</b>  | <span></span>   |
| <b>Website</b>  | Government website ( <span>http://governor.nc.gov</span> )  |

its report to him in January 2008. Following the release of the task force's findings, Cooper assisted members of the North Carolina General Assembly in passing a law which required court clerks to record involuntary commitments in a national gun permit database.<sup>[12]</sup>

Following a decision in 2010 by a three-judge panel to exonerate Gregory Taylor, who had served nearly seventeen years for the first-degree murder of Jaquetta Thomas, Cooper ordered an audit after it was learned that officials at the North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation forensic lab had withheld information. This suppression of evidence had contributed to Taylor's conviction for murder. The audit was released in 2010; it found that it had been common practice for two decades for a select group of agents within the State Bureau of Investigation to withhold information. In addition, they did not keep up with scientific standards and the latest tests. The two investigators, Chris Swecker and Micheal Fox, cited almost 230 cases that were tainted by these actions. Three persons convicted in such cases had been executed; 80 defendants convicted were still serving time in prison. A massive state effort was undertaken to follow up on their cases.



Attorney General Roy Cooper in 2009

Cooper argued his first case before the United States Supreme Court, *J. D. B. v. North Carolina*, in 2011, a case related to Miranda rights in juvenile cases.<sup>[13][14]</sup> The Court ruled 5–4 against North Carolina.<sup>[15][16]</sup>

## Governor of North Carolina

### Elections

#### 2016

Cooper ran for Governor of North Carolina in the 2016 election against incumbent Republican Pat McCrory.<sup>[1]</sup> In March 2016, the North Carolina General Assembly passed the Public Facilities Privacy & Security Act—commonly known as "House Bill 2"—which McCrory signed into law.<sup>[17][18]</sup> Numerous corporations began boycotting the state in protest of the law, cancelling job investment and expansion plans.<sup>[18]</sup> Cooper denounced the law as unconstitutional and refused to defend it in court in his capacity as attorney general.<sup>[19]</sup>



Cooper campaigning in October 2016

As a result of the economic damage caused by the law, McCrory's approval rating dramatically fell in the months preceding the election.<sup>[18]</sup> The election was narrow, and when initial results showed Cooper had an advantage, McCrory claimed without evidence that the election had been manipulated by voter fraud. Recounts resulted in slightly higher margins of victory for Cooper,<sup>[20]</sup> and, after an extended legal battle, McCrory conceded the election on December 5.<sup>[21]</sup> Out of 4.7 million total ballots, Cooper won by a margin 10,227 votes.<sup>[22]</sup>

## 2020

On December 5, 2019, Cooper officially announced his run for re-election to a second term.<sup>[23]</sup>

## Transition

Dismayed by Cooper's win, the General Assembly passed special legislation before he was inaugurated to reduce the power of the governor's office.<sup>[24]</sup> In what *The New York Times* described as a "surprise special session", Republican legislators moved to strip away Cooper's powers before he would assume the governorship on January 1, 2017.<sup>[25]</sup> Throughout the month of December, Cooper oversaw an attempt to repeal the Public Facilities Privacy & Security Act. The repeal attempt failed as a deal between state Republican and Democratic lawmakers and Charlotte officials fell apart.

## Tenure

After taking office, as of January 6, 2017, Cooper requested federal approval for Medicaid coverage expansion in North Carolina.<sup>[26]</sup> Effective January 15, however, a federal judge halted Cooper's request, an order that expired on January 29.<sup>[27][28]</sup> In his first months in office Cooper focused on repealing the Public Facilities Privacy & Security Act. After long negotiations with Republican state legislators, in late March Cooper agreed to sign a law that prohibited North Carolina cities from passing local ordinances pertaining to public accommodations or employment practices for three years in exchange for the reversal of the facilities act.<sup>[29]</sup> On May 9, 2017, President Donald Trump appointed Cooper to a commission tasked with reducing opioid addiction.<sup>[30]</sup>



Cooper being sworn-in as Governor of North Carolina

After the Supreme Court of the United States declared North Carolina's legislative maps to be unconstitutional,<sup>[31]</sup> Cooper called for a special redistricting session on June 7, 2017.<sup>[32]</sup> However, the House and Senate cancelled the session, calling it "unconstitutional".<sup>[33]</sup> On June 29, Cooper signed the STOP Act, an overhaul of the prescribing and dispensing regulations of opioids.<sup>[34]</sup>

On July 1, Cooper signed a bill to allow alcohol sales after 10 AM on Sundays, nicknamed the "Brunch Bill" <sup>[35]</sup> On July 11, Cooper signed "Britney's Law," which states a homicide is first-degree murder if the killing was committed with malice and the defendant has been convicted before of domestic violence or stalking of the victim. Cooper also signed two additional bills to allow domestic violence protective orders granted by a judge to fully go into effect even when they're under appeal and to expand the state's "revenge porn" law from cases involving former lovers to those involving strangers.<sup>[36]</sup> On July 12, Cooper signed a bill that would add lessons on what to do when pulled over by law enforcement to the state's driver's education curriculum. The bill passed both chambers unanimously.<sup>[37]</sup>



Governor Cooper, Dan Forest and Thom Tillis meet with President Donald Trump, September 2018



On July 26, 2017, Cooper signed a bill to mount cameras on school buses in order to reduce drivers who illegally pass stopped school buses.<sup>[38]</sup> On August 31, 2017, he declared a state of emergency due to plummeting gas supply,<sup>[39]</sup> which was rescinded on September 18.<sup>[40]</sup>

Cooper was elected by his fellow Appalachian governors as co-chair of the Appalachian Regional Commission for 2019, making him the first North Carolina governor to co-chair the ARC since Jim Hunt in 1978.<sup>[41]</sup> In the November 2018 elections, the Republican Party lost seats in the General Assembly, ending its supermajorities in both houses and rendering it unable to override gubernatorial vetoes.<sup>[42]</sup> On March 6, 2019, Cooper proposed a \$25.2 billion budget for the year. It included salary increases for public school teachers and state workers, expansion of Medicaid, and a \$3.9 billion bond (subject to a referendum) to help fund school construction and local infrastructure projects. Cooper stated that he was confident he could get the legislature, without enough Republican members to override a veto, to implement some of his ideas.<sup>[43]</sup>

On March 10, 2020 Cooper declared a state of emergency in North Carolina due to the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States.<sup>[44]</sup> Four days later, Cooper issued an executive order banning gatherings of over one hundred people, and closed all K-12 schools for two weeks, across the state of North Carolina.<sup>[45]</sup>

## Vetoes

Cooper's first veto as North Carolina Governor was of a bill that would make elections to the North Carolina Superior Court and to the District Court partisan again, after being conducted on a nonpartisan basis for many years.<sup>[46]</sup> The state House voted to override the veto on March 22, 2017.<sup>[47]</sup> The state Senate followed suit on March 23, which resulted in the bill becoming law over the Governor's objections.<sup>[48]</sup>

Cooper vetoed a bill on April 21, 2017, to reduce the size of the North Carolina Court of Appeals by three judges.<sup>[49]</sup> The veto was overridden on April 26.<sup>[50]</sup> He also vetoed a bill on April 21, 2017, that would create a new State Board of Elections (and new county boards of elections) split evenly between the Republicans and the Democrats. It would replace the longstanding system that gave the party of the Governor of North Carolina a majority on the board.<sup>[49]</sup> Both houses of the legislature voted to override the veto on April 24 and 25.<sup>[51]</sup>

Cooper also vetoed a bill that would limit individuals' ability to sue hog farms.<sup>[52]</sup> This veto was also overridden by the legislature.<sup>[53][54]</sup> On June 27, Cooper vetoed the proposed state budget, which he had called 'Irresponsible' the day before.<sup>[55]</sup> In his veto message, Cooper cited the budget's income tax cuts and argued it "lacks structural integrity by failing to account for population growth, inflation and looming federal reductions, by using one-time revenue for recurring expenses, and by adopting a tax plan that will cause the state to fail to fund promised teacher salary increases in future years" and the proposed bill included "provisions that infringe upon the governor's ability to faithfully execute the laws, including the administration of this Act, as required by the Constitution, and violating the separation of powers." The legislature voted to override the budget veto the next day.<sup>[56]</sup>

In July 2017, Cooper vetoed a bill to authorize nonprofit organizations to operate "game nights", saying it would unintentionally create a new opportunity for the video poker industry.<sup>[57]</sup>

In December 2018, the North Carolina General Assembly passed a bill that would require new primary elections if a do-over election was called in the 9th district election.<sup>[58]</sup> Cooper vetoed the bill due to a provision that made campaign finance investigations less public, but the General Assembly overrode his veto.<sup>[59]</sup>

In May 2019, Cooper vetoed a bill that proposed punishments in the form of prison time and fines against physicians and nurses who do not resuscitate newborns that survive an abortion.<sup>[61]</sup> Cooper stated that the "bill is an unnecessary interference between doctors and their patients"<sup>[62]</sup> and that laws "already protect newborn babies."<sup>[63]</sup>

## Personal life

Roy Cooper is married to Kristin Cooper (née Bernhardt), who worked as a guardian ad litem for foster children in Wake County.<sup>[64][65]</sup> The couple has three daughters who all graduated from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.<sup>[66][67]</sup> They reside in the Executive Mansion. Cooper has taught Sunday school classes, serving as a deacon and elder at his church,<sup>[68]</sup> and is an avid fan of the NHL's Carolina Hurricanes.<sup>[69]</sup>

## Electoral history



Roy Cooper and his family at a campaign rally, November 2016

| 2000 North Carolina Attorney General election |                   |                   |                  |               |
|---|-------------------|-------------------|------------------|---------------|
| Party   |                   | Candidate         | Votes            | %             |
|   | <u>Democratic</u> | <b>Roy Cooper</b> | <b>1,446,793</b> | <b>51.21</b>  |
|   | <u>Republican</u> | Dan Boyce         | 1,310,845        | 46.40         |
|   | <u>Reform</u>     | Margaret Palms    | 67,536           | 2.39          |
| Total votes                                   |                   |                   | <b>2,825,174</b> | <b>100.00</b> |

| 2004 North Carolina Attorney General election |                   |                          |                  |               |
|---|-------------------|--------------------------|------------------|---------------|
| Party   |                   | Candidate                | Votes            | %             |
|   | <u>Democratic</u> | <b>Roy Cooper (inc.)</b> | <b>1,872,097</b> | <b>55.61</b>  |
|   | <u>Republican</u> | Joe Knott                | 1,494,121        | 44.39         |
| Total votes                                   |                   |                          | <b>3,366,218</b> | <b>100.00</b> |

| 2008 North Carolina Attorney General election |                   |                          |                  |               |
|---|-------------------|--------------------------|------------------|---------------|
| Party   |                   | Candidate                | Votes            | %             |
|   | <u>Democratic</u> | <b>Roy Cooper (inc.)</b> | <b>2,538,178</b> | <b>61.10</b>  |
|   | <u>Republican</u> | Bob Crumley              | 1,615,762        | 38.90         |
| Total votes                                   |                   |                          | <b>4,153,940</b> | <b>100.00</b> |

| 2012 North Carolina Attorney General election |                          |                  |               |
|---|--------------------------|------------------|---------------|
| Party   | Candidate                | Votes            | %             |
| <u>Democratic</u>                             | <b>Roy Cooper (inc.)</b> | <b>2,828,941</b> | <b>100.00</b> |
| <b>Total votes</b>                            |                          | <b>2,828,941</b> | <b>100.00</b> |

| 2016 North Carolina Democratic gubernatorial primary |                   |                  |               |
|--|-------------------|------------------|---------------|
| Party  | Candidate         | Votes            | %             |
| <u>Democratic</u>                                    | <b>Roy Cooper</b> | <b>710,658</b>   | <b>68.70</b>  |
| <u>Democratic</u>                                    | Ken Spaulding     | 323,774          | 31.30         |
| <b>Total votes</b>                                   |                   | <b>1,034,432</b> | <b>100.00</b> |

| 2016 North Carolina gubernatorial election |  |                   |                  |              |               |
|--|--|-------------------|------------------|--------------|---------------|
| Party                                      |  | Candidate         | Votes            | %            | ±             |
|  | <u>Democratic</u>                                    | <b>Roy Cooper</b> | <b>2,309,162</b> | <b>49.02</b> | <b>+5.79%</b> |
|  | <u>Republican</u>                                    | Pat McCrory       | 2,298,881        | 48.80        | −5.82%        |
|  | <u>Libertarian</u>                                   | Lon Cecil         | 102,978          | 2.19         | +0.06%        |
| Margin of victory                          |  |                   | 10,281           | 0.22         | −7.92%        |
| Turnout                                    |  |                   | 4,711,021        | 68.98        | +1.68%        |
|  | <u>Democratic</u> <b>gain</b> from <u>Republican</u> |                   |                  |              |               |

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## External links

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- Governor Roy Cooper (<https://governor.nc.gov>) official government site
- Roy Cooper for Governor (<https://www.roycooper.com>) official campaign site
- Roy Cooper ([https://ballotpedia.org/Roy\\_Cooper](https://ballotpedia.org/Roy_Cooper)) at Ballotpedia
- Roy Cooper ([https://curlie.org/Regional/North\\_America/United\\_States/North\\_Carolina/Government/Executive/Governor\\_Roy\\_Cooper](https://curlie.org/Regional/North_America/United_States/North_Carolina/Government/Executive/Governor_Roy_Cooper)) at Curlie
- Appearances (<https://www.c-span.org/person/?roycooper>) on C-SPAN
- Profile (<https://www.votesmart.org/candidate/5900>) at Vote Smart

| Party political offices   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| Preceded by<br><b>Mike Easley</b>   | <b>Democratic nominee for<br/>Attorney General of North<br/>Carolina</b><br>2000, 2004, 2008, 2012 | Succeeded by<br><b>Josh Stein</b>  |
| Preceded by<br><b>Walter Dalton</b>   | <b>Democratic nominee for<br/>Governor of North Carolina</b><br>2016, 2020                         | <b>Most recent</b>   |
| Legal offices   |  |  |
| Preceded by<br><b>Mike Easley</b>   | <b>Attorney General of North<br/>Carolina</b><br>2001–2017   | Succeeded by<br><b>Josh Stein</b>  |
| Political offices   |  |  |
| Preceded by<br><b>Pat McCrory</b>   | <b>Governor of North Carolina</b><br>2017–present  | <b>Incumbent</b>   |
| U.S. order of precedence (ceremonial)                                       |  |  |
| Preceded by<br><b>Mike Pence</b><br><i>as <u>Vice President</u></i>         | <b>Order of Precedence of the<br/>United States</b><br>Within North Carolina                       | Succeeded by<br><b>Mayor of city<br/>in which event is held</b>  |
|   |  | Succeeded by<br><b>Otherwise Nancy Pelosi</b><br><i>as <u>Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives</u></i> |
| Preceded by<br><b>Andrew Cuomo</b><br><i>as <u>Governor of New York</u></i> | <b>Order of Precedence of the<br/>United States</b><br>Outside North Carolina                      | Succeeded by<br><b>Gina Raimondo</b><br><i>as <u>Governor of Rhode Island</u></i>                              |

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